



THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN THE ETERNAL CITY

Rome always was in touch with Christians of the East. The patron saints of Europe, Cyril and Methodius, sent on a mission to Constantinople, wanted to come by Pope Adrian II to have the approval, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Byzantine rite in the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Mary Major. Adrian II approved the Slavonic liturgical books saying, "I order to solemnly testify to altar of the church of St. Mary Major, and I recommend to ordain priests their disciples". In the middle Ages, in Rome alongside the Latin monasteries, there were convents inhabited by the Eastern monks. They came from Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Syria, Armenia and brought Rome their culture, relics of their saints, their liturgy, Marian icons, still venerated in the Basilicas and churches in Rome; the oldest are in the Basilica of *Santa Maria Nuova* and *Santa Maria in Trastevere*. This shows that the presence of Oriental Catholics dates back to the very beginning.

Though Christianity originated in the East, now Rome is its centre. In the past Western Christendom often considered

Eastern Christianity less Catholic, even though, in fact it was the Eastern Christianity which helped to preserve the catholic nature of the Church by protecting the various ecclesial traditions with regard to liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline and safeguarding the cultural diversities in the Church. The Second Vatican Council says that the distinctive traditions are part of the "divinely revealed undivided heritage of the Universal Church". The phenomenon of migration has brought the oriental faithful into the whole world, and now, their presence in Rome is very significant. There are twelve Catholic Oriental communities in the diocese of Rome. We analyse each of them as well as see its juridical status.

1. The Coptic Church

In 2003, the presence of 200 faithful of the Coptic Catholic Church in Rome was noted. Their rectory is at *Chiesa Sant'Andrea del Vignola*. The Coptic Catholics celebrate their liturgy every Sunday; and at times catechism for the children follows. The juridical status of the community is Chaplain with *Missione con cura d'anime*.

2. The Ethiopian Church

The Presence of the Ethiopian faithful in Rome dates back to the 1970s. The first church given to the Ethiopian faithful was *San Tommaso in Parione* near to the Church of *Sant'Andrea*. This Church was known as the national church of the Ethiopians till 1994. The majority of the Ethiopian Catholics were from Eritrea, and after the independence of Eritrea this church was given to the latter. From 2013, *Santa Maria in Monticelli* was given for the Ethiopians. There are only 72 faithful and liturgy is celebrated on every Sunday. The juridical status of the community is Chaplain with *Missione con cura d'anime*.

3. The Eritrean Church

Till 1994 the Ethiopian Catholic community and the Eritrean community were together, and they had one Church in common. The church *San Tommaso in Parione* was one of the two national churches of Ethiopia in Rome. After the formation of Eritrea, this church was given to the Eritreans as a rectory with a rector. There are around 150 faithful of the Eritrean Church in Rome and the liturgical celebrations take place on every Sunday and Thursday. The juridical status of the community is Chaplain with *Missione con cura d'anime*.

4. The Syrian Church

In 1900, a Procura for the Patriarch of Syrian Antiochian Church was given in *Santa Maria della Concezione in Campo Marzio* Roma. This church serves as the national church for Syria and the seat of the procurator to the Holy See for the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch. In the first stage, the faithful from Syria were young people coming as students for studying medicine, architecture, banking etc. Many of them, after the training continued to live in Rome. Today's immigrants are coming in search of jobs and as war refugees. There are around 70 families and 40 young people as refugees of war. There are liturgical celebrationson on

every Sunday and Saturday. The Church *Santa Maria della Concezione in Campo Marzio* is a rectory too, with a rector. The juridical status of the community is Priest in Charge of the community.

5. The Maronite Church

The presence of the Maronites in Rome was more clerical than of laity till 20 century. Then many young people came to Italy, especially Rome, for studying medicine, architecture, economics and engineering; and many of them decided to settle in Rome. Many married italians and became italian citizens. Recently many came to Italy due to the wars in Lebanon. There are 320 Maronite families in Rome. *Chiesa San Marum in Via di Pota Pinciana* is the national church of Lebanon. Every Sunday and Thursday there are liturgical celebrations. The juridical status of the community is Chaplain with *Missione con cura d'anime*.

6. The Syro-Malabar Church

The Syro-Malabar Catholics began their immigration to Italy in the early seventies of the last century. From 07 November 1993 onwards the Catholic community from Kerala in Rome began to meet for prayer and holy mass on Sund, and in the early stages, priests from Damascene College were helping the community with holy mass. The community got recognised by the Vicariate of Rome on 11 December 1994. Now the number of faithful increased to seven thousand and became the second largest Oriental Catholic community in Rome. The principal centre allotted for the community from the Vicariate is the Basilica di *Sant'Anastasia al Palatino* in *Piazza di Sant'Anastasia*. Every Sunday there are ten Holy Masses in different centres and catechism twice a month on Saturdays. There are 13 Syro Malabar indigenous religious congregations having their presence in the eternal city with 20 communities. Recently, on 12 October 2019, *Domus Mar Thoma*, Procura of the Syro Malabar Church at the

Holy See, was inaugurated and is situated in *Via degli Estensi 137*. The juridical status of the community is chaplain with *missione con cura d'anime*. On 8 July 2020, a decree was issued by the Vicariate of Rome entrusting the Basilica of Sant'Anastasia al Palatino with rectory to the Syro-Malabar community and chaplain holds the responsibility of the Rector of the Basilica too.

7. The Armenian Church

Pope Leo XIII in 1838 established Pontifical Armenian College in Rome for the formation of the priests of the Armenian Catholic Church. The college is located in the Trevi district. Adjacent to the College there is the church of *San Nicolo di Tolentino*, the Catholic church of the Armenian rite. This Church is a rectory and the pastoral activities of the Armenian community is based in this rectory. There are 100 Armenian Catholic families in Rome and they have liturgical celebrations on every Saturday and Sunday. The juridical status of the community is Priest in Charge of the community, who is also the rector of the rectory.

8. The Melkite Church

Until II World War there was a community of Melkite Catholic faithful in Livorno. There was one Church in Livorno but it was destroyed during II World War. The Melkite Catholic faithful dispersed into different parts of Italy. After the Second Vatican Council Pope Paul VI has given the church of *Santa Maria in Cosmedin* to the Melkite Catholic Patriarch Maximus IV. This church is a rectory, and a Melkite priest is the rector. The church serves as the centre for the pastoral care of the Melkite Catholics. The rectory is associated with the parish *Santa Prisca*. Around 50 families settled in Rome, but due to the recent wars almost 200 families joined to the community. There are liturgical celebrations on every Sunday and in Arabic language on every Friday. The Juridical Status of the community is Priest in Charge for the community. The Melkite

Catholic Patriarch has a Procura in *Monte Verde*, Rome and the procurator is the rector of the rectory of *Santa Maria in Cosmedin* as well as the priest in charge of the faithful of Melkite Catholics in Rome.

9. The Greek Church

The Church of Sant'Atanasio is a Roman Catholic titular Church in Rome built for the use of the Greek College for the formation of Catholic clergy. The college was founded by Gregory XIII on 3rd November 1576 and was destined for the entire Greek Church. The Church of *Sant'Atanasio* is a part of the Pontifical College for the Greek Catholics and also known as the national church of the Greeks. In 1872 the church was entrusted to the Congregation of the Oriental Churches. The church of *Sant'Atanasio* gives particular testimony to the Byzantine tradition in Rome. This church is a rectory attached to the Pontifical College for Greeks. The community is very small having only around thirty faithful. Since the college is under the Congregation for the Oriental Churches there is no other connection with Roman vicariate in the pastoral activities. There are Vespers on every Saturday and liturgical celebration on every Sunday. The rector of the college is the Priest in Charge of the community.

10. The Romanian Church

The Romanian Church got a rectory called *Chiesa Rettoria San Salvatore alle Coppelle* in *Piazza della Coppelle* in Rome. On 31 March 1914, the church was made the national church for the Greek Catholics of Romania and began to be used for services in the Byzantine Rite. There are around 1000 faithful in Rome and four mass centres. Every Sunday there is liturgical celebration and catechism. The juridical status of the community is Chaplain with *Missione con cura d'anime*.

11. The Russian Church

The Russian Catholic Church in Rome has always been connected with the

Collegium Russicum, a Catholic college dedicated to studies of the culture and spirituality of Russia. It was founded on August 15, 1929 by Pope Pius XI, who was touched by the large flow of immigrants from Bolshevik Russia and the persecution of Christianity in that country. After the Vatican II, the aim of the *Russicum* evolved from converting Russia to Catholicism to promote a good relationship between the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The *Collegium Russicum* is run by the Society of Jesus and provides education and accommodation for Catholic and Orthodox students. The college is under the Oriental Congregation and the church is connected with the college. On every Saturday there is vespers and on every Sunday there is liturgy. The presence of the faithful is very small comprising 50 to 60 persons for Sunday liturgy. At present, the college of *Russicum* has no connection with Roman Vicariate and community has no canonical or juridical status.

12. The Ukrainian Church

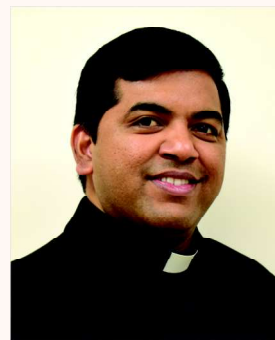
The Ukrainian Church is the largest Oriental Catholic community in the Vicariate of Rome and the only one having the juridical status of a personal parish. The number of the faithful is almost 15,000 and there are four priests for the pastoral care of the faithful. *Basilica Santa Sofia* in *Via Boccea* is a rectory of the Ukrainian Church in Rome. It is the national church for the Ukrainians in Rome, a meeting place and religious centre for the community. Divine Liturgy is celebrated according to the Byzantine-Ukrainian Rite. Besides, the Ukrainians have another church in Rome located at *Piazza Madonna dei Monti* in the rione of Monti and it was officially known as the parish Church of the *Santi Sergio e Bacco* of the Ukrainian Catholics. Since Pope Francis established an exarchate on 11 July 2019 for the 145 Ukrainian Greek Catholic parishes in Italy, this Church became the Cathedral.

Conclusion

The juridical status of the Oriental Catholic communities in Rome is divided into four categories:

- a) Personal Parish: Ukrainian
- b) Mission with care of souls (*Missione con cura d'anima*): Coptic, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Maronite and Syro-Malabar.
- c) Community guided by priests with other ecclesiastical responsibility: Melkite, Romanian and Syrian
- d) Community guided by responsible priest or laity without any specific ecclesiastical title: Russian

The eternal city is rich with the presence of many migrant communities. It may be the only city where people from all continents are peacefully living together. There are 37 migrant communities in the diocese of Rome. Since Rome is the centre of Catholic Church, the presence of the people from all over the world makes its really universal and catholic. The presence of migrants is not the same as the presence of tourists; migrants live in this city as communities. The diocese of Rome provides the pastoral care for the migrant communities. All the activities of the Roman vicariate for the pastoral care of the migrants is done through the Office of the Pastoral Care for the Migrants.



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